

UP FRONT



NEIGHBORHOOD STORIES

By Bette McDevitt

Ukrainian School Carnegie, Pa.

It's Saturday morning in Carnegie, and children are arriving for "Ridna Shkola," Ukrainian for "Native School," at the Ukrainian Trinity Catholic Church. They saunter in, except for Maria, who is carrying a large, gift-wrapped box. She skips, hops, and dances across the room to place the package on a table. "It's a birthday gift for her," she says, pointing to Stephanie, another student. Both are openly delighted as only eight-year-old girls can be. Maria, with her chestnut hair, and Stephanie, with a single thick braid of golden hair halfway down her back, are both of Ukrainian descent. Maria was born here, of Ukrainian parents, and Stephanie came from Ukraine two months ago. Her English is halting, but she and Maria began to chatter—and giggle—in Ukrainian. That in itself would be reason enough for Saturday School, but there is more.

Ridna Shkola began in 1969, says Luba Hlutkowsky, founding director of the school, to pass on the Ukrainian language, culture, and history to children. This is a vigorous national mission, born of an endangered culture. Ukraine was ravaged by both Nazi Germany and Joseph Stalin, whose intent was to destroy Ukrainian culture. Replacing the language with Russian was one of the more openly used tools, but mass killings and imprisonment, especially of the artists and intelligentsia, were commonplace.

Luba came from Ukraine as a child with

her parents, in the second wave of immigrants following World War II. "We ran from our home, to escape living under Stalin," she says. When she and her husband, who is also Ukrainian, had children, she told him, "We have to do something for our children." So she began the school, located first at Duquesne University, then on Pittsburgh's South Side, and finally, in Carnegie, where the Ukrainian community numbers close to 20,000. Luba estimates there are 40,000 Ukrainians in Western Pennsylvania, one of the largest settlements in the country.

Luba speaks often of the "fourth wave" of

immigrants, those coming within the last 10 years, like Stephanie and Maria's families. Each "wave" is different. The first came in the 1900s to work in the mills and mines. Their children learned English in school, and didn't keep up the tradition of speaking their own language at home. It was the time of the "melting pot," when America became homogenized. Immigrants in the second wave, after World War II, came to escape Stalin's repressive regime; the third wave came shortly thereafter to escape religious persecution. "Everyone was becoming a Baptist to get out of there," says Luba.

The fourth wave, the most recent, has



Christina Hlutkowsky
demonstrating the bandura.

Photo by Bette McDevitt.



Teacher Christina Hlutkowsky
helps Alexander Konecky
with his bandura.

Photo by Bette McDevitt.



Maria Smereka and Yaryna Korenovskiy play their banduras during Saturday School.


Photo by Bette McDevitt.

given the school an infusion of energy. “We had some lean years, when we had more teachers than students, but these new arrivals are more diligent, and more educated. They bring their children because they don’t want them to lose the language. Some members of this fourth wave were taught Russian in the schools, and they want their children to speak Ukrainian, not the Russian language that was forced upon them.” Many were winners of the Green Card Lottery, which means they had a sponsor in the United States, Luba explains, and they tend to come to the area where the sponsor has settled.

At the Saturday School, it was serious business, an hour’s study of language, then history, with the groups broken down into four groups by age. There was time for some banter, and some socializing over lunch. On Monday, most of the children take part in a dance program, the Kyiv Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, at Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian

Orthodox Church, also in Carnegie. “We two churches live well together,” says Luba. The dancers take part in the Pittsburgh Folk Festival every spring. Some are learning to play the bandura, a large string instrument that sounds like a heavenly harp.

Luba’s granddaughter, Christina Hlutkowsky, teaches the bandura class held at the Saturday School. Speaking to her students, as she helped them tune the bandura, she says, “Playing the bandura is really cool. If it weren’t, I wouldn’t have gone to the bandura summer camp for eight years.” She is referring to an internationally attended program held every summer in Emlenton, Pa.

The intensity of the national movement to preserve the rich Ukrainian culture shines a light on the rest of us, some laggards, but all immigrants of one kind or another. Luba thinks the Ukrainian effort might be so vigorous because the memories are so fresh. “Ukraine has only had independence for 20 years, and even now it is a question of how it will go.” 

For more information about the Saturday School, contact Luba at (412) 279-7377. Visit www.bandura.org/bandura_school.htm for information about the summer bandura program.

Bette McDevitt is a freelance writer and long-time contributor to *Western Pennsylvania History*.



Historical Society of Carnegie PA

- The Historical Society of Carnegie PA is located just six miles from downtown Pittsburgh at One West Main Street, Carnegie, Pa. The town has a rich history spanning more than 100 years, formed when the towns of Mansfield and Chartiers merged. Residents honored Andrew Carnegie by naming their new town after him.
- The Historical Society of Carnegie PA was formed in 1990 to help plan the town’s centennial celebration in 1994 and has continued to preserve Carnegie’s growing history.
- A historic 1896 four-story building owned by the society houses a collection of local history and archives documenting everything from governmental minutes to the St. Peter and St. Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church bulletins.
- Permanent exhibits include the Honus Wagner Museum and the Military Wall. A highlight is a 100-foot-long replica of the town, including recreations of several building interiors.
- Visit www.carnegiehistory.org or contact the Historical Society of Carnegie PA at history9@comcast.net or (412) 276-7447.

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To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Natalie DeRiso, Community Programs Manager, at nnderiso@heinzhistorycenter.org or (412) 454-6373.